



AFT Connecticut
AFT, AFL-CIO

Testimony
Education Committee
Sharon M. Palmer

March 5, 2012

Good afternoon Sen. Stillman, Rep. Fleischmann, and members of the Committee. I am Sharon Palmer, President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse 28,000-member AFL-CIO union. I am here today to remark on four bills—300, 303, 304, and 5350.

Let me begin by adding our voice to the chorus of support for SB300, regarding early childhood education. We all know what a remarkable difference this investment in early education can make. We suggest you reduce the number (2000) of charter school slots, and increase the early childhood slots (500). The more children we can move into a high quality, affordable program, the faster we will close the achievement gap.

HB 5350, concerning literacy by grade three, is the other highly important bill before you today. It is also an extremely critical, key initiative to close the achievement gap. The research shows that if a child is not able to read by the completion of the third grade, that child's likelihood of success is significantly reduced. HB 5350 outlines comprehensive measures to help children achieve literacy by grade three.

We urge you to pass both SB 300 and HB 5350, and include the resources necessary to accomplish these goals.

AFT Connecticut strongly supports SB 304, concerning the inclusion of labor history in the public school curriculum. Very little labor history is taught in our schools; that which does exist is mostly about labor's early years surrounding the Industrial Revolution, strikes, and violence. Rarely are students exposed to learning labor's role with enacting child labor laws, health and safety standards, "the weekend," vacation, sick time, pensions, healthcare, etc. We thank you for providing this hearing and realize the existing statute currently includes many programs. We believe labor history to be on a par with those already included in the statute. Please support this bill.

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SB 303, concerning boards of education, is a bill which we strongly urge you to reject. You may recall we also urged you to reject similar language in SB 24. We believe it is heavy handed and takes away the rights of duly-elected officials, primarily in urban centers.

One popular phrase today is that education is the civil rights issue of the new century. We have heard it over and over—and it may be true. However, we think you should beware of anyone who speaks on one hand about the civil rights of children while on the other hand supports taking away the civil rights of the children's parents, relatives, neighbors, and community. What message does this send? What lesson do the children learn? Reject this bill!

We suggest you look at a partnership model similar to the special master legislation in Windham. This model respects the community while offering significant assistance and direction to the local district.

Thank you for listening and providing this opportunity to be heard.